

Panther Leadership Hurt By Sweeping FBI Raids

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Early on the morning of June 4, a city police car moved into position to close the intersection of Madison Street and Western Avenue on the West Side Chicago slum. A block away a car belonging to the Chicago detail of the Federal Bureau of Investigation blocked another intersection.

To the sleepy-eyed early riser, it all may have seemed strange, but to anyone who had listened to the Chicago Police frequency for the previous 15 minutes, there would have been no mystery. The police dispatcher had said:

"The FBI has informed us they are going to raid the Black Panther headquarters on Madison Street. They request that all Chicago police cars stay out of the area."

Twice scarred by rioting, the West Side is the heart of the poorest of Chicago's two largest black areas.

More FBI cars were moving in within moments, agents emerged and strapped on bulletproof vests and attached white armbands to their left coatsleeves with the red lettering, U.S. Department of Justice.

Some took positions on the roof of the building with machine guns and shotguns in hand. Others crouched in the street behind their parked vehicles.

After shouting through a bullhorn for 30 minutes for the occupants of the building to come out, Marlin Johnson, the agent in charge, ordered the doors sledgehammered open and agents rushed inside.

The eight occupants within were led away quietly, a mimeograph machine was confiscated as was some cash and checks and a large quantity of literature.

But the announced purpose of the search, a Federal fugitive by the name of George Sams, was not found in the building. Later, the eight arrested in the building were freed.

Such raids—similar ones have occurred in Denver, Washington and Salt Lake City—have become almost routine within the past two months.

Federal officials are seeking Sams and other fugitives in connection with the murder of a Panther in Connecticut. In pursuit, FBI agents have raided panther headquarters across the country.

But the Panthers have charged that the manhunt is a small part of the reason for the raids, that "fascist police state tactics" are being used to harass and crush the organization.

Bobby Seale, chairman of the party, charged in a press conference at the Berkeley headquarters of the organization recently that the raids were an attempt "to destroy . . . the Black

Panther party leadership."

A Justice Department official said yesterday there is no national plan by the Department regarding raids on Panther offices.

The reason for conducting the raids at early morning hours is to avoid attracting crowds that might turn into riots, the Department official said. "Most of their offices are right in the middle of the black communities," he said.

The Black Panther party has long claimed its leadership has been harassed by the police. Two of the party's founders, Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver, are in jail and exile respectively. Cleaver, a fugitive from justice, is now living in Cuba.

But those instances, involving convictions for specific crimes, were in California at a time when the party had not yet gone beyond its Oakland and San Francisco Bay area origins.

In the past year, however, the party's membership and its notoriety have spread across the country in 40 chapters with a membership estimated variously between 1200 and 5000.

The Party's organizing activities have led to increasingly abrasive confrontations between the Panthers and police in city after city.

Since the end of last year, scores of Panthers have been arrested in chapters throughout the country on charges ranging from possession of concealed weapons to arson and armed robbery.

The first big arrest of the year occurred in New York on April 2 when 21 Black Panthers were indicted on charges of conspiracy to blow up several public buildings and department stores.

Six weeks later, in a case police claimed was "directly linked" to the alleged bombing conspiracy, eight Panthers were arrested in New Haven, Conn., and charged with the murder of Alex Rackley, 24, a New York Panther.

Searching for other suspects in the New Haven murder, in which police say Rackley was also tortured, Federal agents carried out a succession of raids in at least four cities in the next several weeks. They were:

- The June 4 raid in Chicago where the FBI arrested eight persons, and confiscated funds used in the Panther breakfast program for school children along with thousands of pieces of Panther literature. The money later was returned.

- A raid in Washington where the search for Sams led the FBI on June 6

to the apartment of Mrs. Jean Hughes, 4111 Southern ave., across the District line in Prince George's County. She was charged with possessing a stolen rifle.

- In Salt Lake City, where FBI agents charged Lonnie McClucas, 23, of New Haven, with being a fugitive from justice in the Rackley slaying. He was held on \$100,000 bail.

- In Denver, where Rory Hithe, 18, and Landon Robert Williams, 25, were charged with unlawful flight to avoid prosecution in the Rackley case and held on bonds of \$200,000 each.

The Black Panthers have also run afoul of local law agencies in such widely separated locations as Eugene, Ore., Indianapolis and Sacramento.

In the Indianapolis case, police raided the Panther office on the night of June 7 in the midst of a disturbance involving some 400 blacks. Of the 30 persons arrested, half were Panthers.

Eight days later in Sacramento, the Panther offices were stormed by city police during a shootout near Panther headquarters. Mayor Richard Marriott, who made a personal inspection of the Panther offices, later said he was "shocked and horrified" at the evidence of bullet holes, broken typewriters and damaged food, the results of the police raid.

Panther national chief of staff David Hilliard has charged Federal and local police with deliberately storming the organization's offices across the country under the guise of searching for suspects in crimes or reacting to local disorders.

"We see the rapid growth of the party and the respect we are beginning to gain in both the black and some white communities as the basis of this constant harassment," Hilliard said. "The pigs have moved in such a bra-

zen, chauvenistic fashion that people are beginning to relate to the Panthers."

While police activity might be gaining some sympathy for the Panthers, it has also nearly stripped several of the organization's chapters of their leadership. In addition, continued charges of crimes by Panthers have served to alarm more moderate elements of black and white activists.

Gerald Lefcourt, New York attorney for the Black Panther party, said in a recent interview:

"The only thing the Panthers are worried about now is survival. They are perfectly sure that the government is out to wipe them out in a year.

"For the Panthers," Lefcourt continued, there is pure fascism today—illegal searches, phony charges, high bails, massive arrests—it's here for the Panthers."

But, to law enforcement officials, such as New York County Assistant District Attorney Joseph A. Phillips, the Panthers represent "distorted and twisted minds bent upon acts of terrorism."

The notoriety, the legal charges, the raids and the controversy all center on an organization that is barely three years old.

Formed in 1966 after a series of conflicts between Negro youths and Oakland, Calif., police, the Panthers first came to wider national attention after their co-founder, Huey P. Newton, was charged with murdering an Oakland policeman.

Since then, the Panthers and police have been in repeated clashes. It was the Panthers who coined and circulated the term "pigs" to refer to policemen.

As the group's national prominence grew, it attracted to its ranks author Eldridge Cleaver, and Stokely Carmichael, now living in Guinea, West Africa.

It also attracted many young urban street youths. The Panthers began achieving a reputation as a violent organization last year when several West Coast members were arrested in armed robbery cases.

To correct its image, the Panthers purged 40 of its Oakland members and possibly three times that many nationwide.

The organization also created a breakfast program for school children

in many of the large cities. With the food, the children were served a diet of political rhetoric.

But, the program has been extremely popular in most of the cities in which it has been tried, leading the Panthers to charge that one of the reasons for their "harassment" is the political success of the breakfast program.

In the face of its present legal problems, the Panther organization has gone on the counterattack with two devices.

It has formed a national lawyers council to co-ordinate Panther legal defenses nationwide. Attorneys William M. Kunstler of New York and Charles Garry of San Francisco head the council.

The Panthers have also called for a "national revolutionary conference" to form a "United Front Against Fascism." The meeting is scheduled to be held in Oakland, beginning on July 18.

The primary objective of the meeting, the Panthers say, is to bring together radical, leftist and liberal groups and individuals—white and black—to form a new coalition against "political repression."